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ABSTRACT

An evaluation was conducted of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), a program that aims to improve the skills of young people in Scotland to enable them to be effective, enterprising, and capable at work. The evaluation looked at the extent to which TVEI had enhanced the acquisition of certain key skills (communicating, working individually and in teams, solving problems, taking responsibility, being enterprising, and using modern technology) and any approaches that had been successful in promoting the development of these skills in young people. Information was gathered through surveys of staff and pupils in higher and further education and of employers and through case studies. The study found that oral communication was the one skill valued by all groups and that this skill was widely thought to have improved in recent years, although only a quarter of pupils found oral communication to be very easy. The study also found that the different groups had different expectations of school leavers and concluded that teachers should be aware of these expectations. Pupils named a range of subjects that they thought were helpful in developing the TVEI skills, and they preferred to learn by doing the same work as others but at their own pace. Work experience was also accepted by pupils and staff as providing opportunities to practice skills. The study also found differences between what teachers thought they should be teaching and what they were actually teaching. Schools in the case studies used both whole-school approaches and specific skills-based courses to help pupils to acquire and practice the TVEI skills. (KC)

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THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

No 26

School for Skills

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School for Skills

Marion Devine, Sue Mingard, Natalie Fenwick and Harry Black

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) aims to improve the skills of young people to enable them to be effective, enterprising and capable at work. This evaluation looked at the extent to which TVEI had enhanced the acquisition of certain key skills and any particular approaches which had been successful in promoting the development of these skills in young people.

Background

The first Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) pilot projects were launched in Scotland in 1984 as part of a British-wide initiative. Since then every local authority secondary school and further education college in every region in Scotland has been influenced by the Initiative and an extensive series of evaluations at both national and local level have kept track of developments. In 1993, the TVEI Unit of the Scottish Office Industry Department asked the Scottish Council for Research in Education to evaluate the development of a range of personal and transferable skills which had been given prominence by TVEI.

'TVEI skills'

The skills which were identified as the focus for this study included communicating, working individually and in teams, problem solving, taking responsibility, enterprise and using modern technology. In this study they were referred to as 'TVEI skills'.

TVEI aims to improve the skills of young people to enable them to be effective, enterprising and capable at work.

To what extent are these skills part of the curriculum?

The evaluation

The aims of the evaluation were:

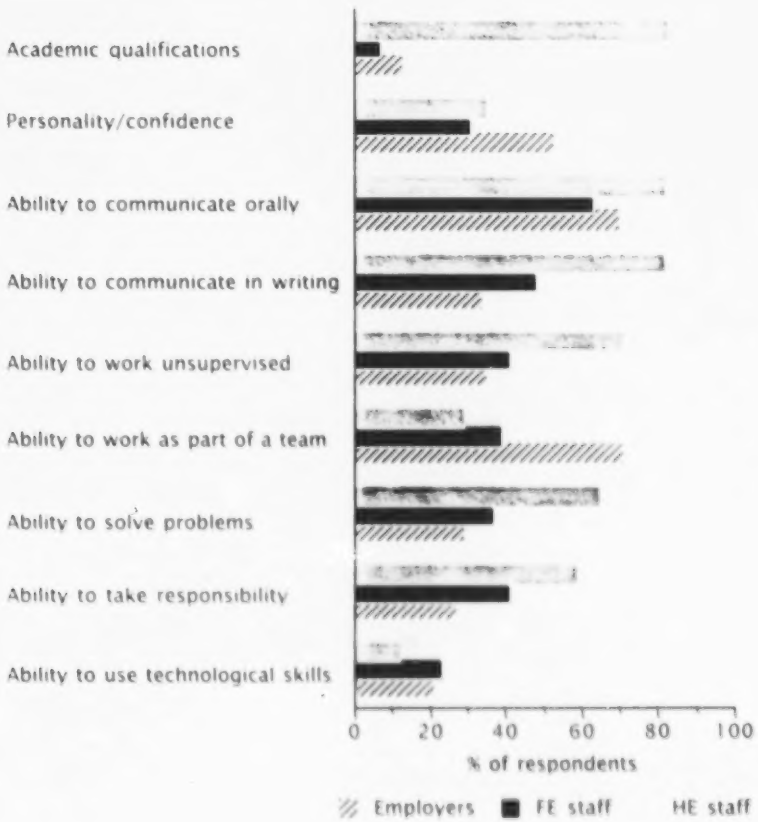
- to consider the extent to which TVEI had enhanced the acquisition of these skills in young people: a national survey obtained the views of teachers, school liaison coordinators in further and higher education institutions, employers and young people in schools and colleges.
- to identify any particular approaches which had been successful in developing these skills: a number of individual schools were studied in detail. Four were mainstream schools recommended by TVEI project coordinators as being examples of good practice in the development of skills and committed to the philosophy of TVEI. Since one of the aims of TVEI is to improve the skills of all young people, a fifth case study included special schools in one local authority and one mainstream school in another authority which had a unit for pupils with special educational needs.

Findings from the national survey

Are 'TVEI skills' valued?

Staff in higher (HE) and further education (FE) institutions and employers were asked to rate the importance of a range of qualities and skills when recruiting young people for admission to university or college or for employment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Qualities and skills considered very important for school leavers



Different groups have different expectations of the skills which young people need.

To what extent should young people and their teachers be aware of these different expectations? What are the implications for schools?

A skill which a majority of all groups identified as very important was the ability to communicate orally. In addition, the majority of staff in HE institutions attached great importance to the ability to communicate in writing, to work unsupervised, to solve problems and to take responsibility. They were the group who were least interested in young people's ability to use technology.

Almost three quarters of employers believed that it was very important for young people to be able to work as part of a team. Employers who offered training positions to school leavers were more likely to stress the importance of being able to solve problems, work unsupervised and use technology than those who did not.

What do schools contribute to the acquisition of 'TVEI skills'?

Pupils were asked to say how well school had helped them to develop 'TVEI skills' and to identify subjects which were particularly helpful. More than three-quarters of all pupils thought that schools were either good or excellent at helping them to develop each of the skills.

The subjects which young people saw as helpful in developing these skills were to some extent determined by the numbers of pupils studying them: for example, English was commonly cited, classical studies rarely. However the pupils were able to name different subjects for different skills and the great majority identified some part of the curriculum which provided opportunities to learn each of the skills.

Pupils believe that schools are good at developing 'TVEI skills'. However, their choice of helpful subjects is limited and perhaps based on stereotypical views.

Do teachers do enough to make pupils aware of the range of skills being used or developed in the different subject areas?

Which skills do pupils feel at ease with?

Pupils in schools and FE students were asked how easy they thought it was to use each of the 'TVEI skills'. The two groups gave very similar responses, with a slightly smaller proportion of FE students than school pupils finding each of the skills 'very easy' to use (Table 1).

Table 1. The proportion of pupils and students who found skills very easy to use

	% of respondents	
	School pupils	*FE students*
Communicate orally	26	24
Work individually	34	30
Work in teams	45	44
Solve problems	17	16
Use technology	35	35

There were differences between the sexes in the skills with which pupils felt at ease. Girls were more at ease in communicating orally, working in teams and working individually. Boys were more at ease with problem solving and using technology.

In 1988, as part of the national monitoring of the TVEI pilot projects, information had been collected on how comfortable pupils felt with a range of skills. This made it possible to compare S4 pupils in 1993 with those of five years ago on four skills which have been continuously targeted by TVEI: oral communication, working in teams, problem solving and using technology. The results indicated a steady improvement for both boys and girls in how at ease they felt with each of the skills. Working in teams showed the greatest overall increase while oral communication showed the least.

There were differences between boys and girls in their perceptions of how easy skills are. The differences point to long-standing gender stereotyping.

What more can schools do to address this?

How well do pupils perform on 'TVEI skills' ?

Well over half of all employers were satisfied with the performance of recent school leavers on each of the TVEI skills. In two of the skills which employers identified as most important — working in teams and communicating orally — 90% of employers judged pupils' ability to be satisfactory.

Senior staff in schools and school liaison staff in HE and FE institutions were asked to review pupils' performances over the last few years and to indicate if they had noted any changes. Nearly all school staff noted improvements in most of the competences. The improvement was most marked in relation to using technology. Staff in HE and FE institutions also noted an increase in these skills.

Young people in Scotland have traditionally been seen as less skilled in oral communication than their peers elsewhere. The widely agreed improvement in this is, therefore, a success story.

Can the same success now be applied to communicating in writing?

Has TVEI played a role in the development of these skills?

The results indicate that:

- skills which TVEI identified as the focus for this study were among those valued by employers, HE and FE institutions.
- staff in schools and HE and FE institutions felt that performance had improved in the ability to communicate orally, to work in teams, to solve problems and to use technology.
- over 90% of employers were satisfied with the performance of recent school leavers in the two skills which they had identified as most important: working in team and communicating orally.
- more pupils in 1993 than 1988 felt at ease in their ability to solve problems, to work in teams, to use technology and to communicate.
- more than three quarters of pupils also felt that school was good at helping them develop each of the skills.

There is, therefore, evidence that schools have been successful in helping pupils to acquire most of the 'TVEI skills'. It was also important for the evaluation to look at what role TVEI had played in this success story. Evidence for the positive influence of TVEI was twofold and came mainly from teachers' views about influences on pupil performance and on teaching methods.

Influences on pupil performance

When asked what factors had influenced pupils performance, the largest number of teachers reported selected changes in the curriculum, such as the move towards Standard grade, revised Higher grades and SCOTVEC modules. The second largest group referred to a range of TVEI experiences; these included technology enhancement, problem solving sessions, development of courses on personal and social development, work experience, enterprise education and staff development.

Influences on teaching methods

When asked what factors had influenced teaching methods, TVEI was selected by the largest group of staff. It was felt to have been influential in promoting pupil-centred learning, differentiation, flexible learning and supported self study. New examination and assessment arrangements were mentioned by the next largest group, followed by staff development and increased use of technology.

Teaching methods are reported to have changed radically in recent years.

To what extent do teachers consciously try to choose different methods matched to pupils' needs and the skills to be acquired?

It is clear that a range of initiatives including Standard grade courses, TVEI and more recently revised Higher grades, SCOTVEC modules and the 5–14 development programme has been working together to focus on the acquisition of transferable skills and to promote changes to teaching and learning which will help to develop these skills. The various agents for change have complemented each other in the support of similar aims.

Findings from individual school studies

Which approaches are successful in the development of 'TVEI skills'?

The schools visited used two basic strategies to promote the acquisition and development of personal and transferable skills. These strategies — whole-school approaches and specific skills based courses — were not mutually exclusive.

Whole school initiatives are likely to be more influential than individual departmental or personal initiatives.

What support can be offered to schools to help them identify and build on good practice? Do schools make the best use of existing professionalism within the school?

Whole school approaches

Three of the case studies emphasised a whole-school approach to the development of skills:

- Study A used an audit of skills to identify common skills and ensure that these were neither under-taught nor over-taught.
- Study D had a staff development programme to 'demystify' flexible learning and encourage teaching methods which would promote the development of 'TVEI skills'.

- In study E the 'TVEI' skills permeated the curriculum for pupils with special needs. The teaching methods used frequently by staff in special schools differed substantially from those of mainstream schools: frequent use was made of team teaching, and differentiated work.

Skills based courses

Schools in three studies used specific skills based courses for the development of selected skills:

- Study B used personal and social development for senior pupils which focused on the skills of communicating, working in teams and taking responsibility.
- Study C had an entitlement for S3/S4 pupils in social and vocation skills and physical education (both Standard grade courses). Social and vocation skills focused on oral communication, working in teams, solving problems and taking responsibility.
- Study D had courses on enterprise education for pupils in S3/S4 which influenced the development of oral communication, working in teams, solving problems and taking responsibility.

One school adopted an approach to skills development which made use of Standard grade courses. In another a special course was devised.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

The various strategies designed to encourage the acquisition and development of 'TVEI skills' were mainly successful in their aims and the more detailed descriptions in the full report of the case studies — *School for Skills: Vignette Studies* — highlight their successes and limitations.

Implications

From the national survey:

- Oral communication was the one skill which was valued by all groups who have expectations of young people at the end of their school careers. It was also a skill which was widely thought to have improved in recent years. Yet, only a quarter of the national sample of pupils found oral communication very easy. Teachers need to be prepared to boost the confidence of pupils in their own ability.
- Different groups had different expectations of school leavers: HE institutions wanted pupils who could communicate orally and in writing, work unsupervised, solve problems and take responsibility; employers wanted young people who could communicate orally and work as part of a team ; employers who were offering training positions wanted pupils who could use modern technology, solve problems and work unsupervised. Teachers must be aware of these differences in order to help young people acquire a suitably broad range of skills.
- Pupils named a range of subjects which they felt were helpful in developing each of the 'TVEI skills'. Teachers could build on this knowledge by discussing with pupils the different contexts in which the skills associated with their subjects could be practised and developed.
- Pupils preferred to learn by following the same work as others but at their own pace. Few pupils preferred learning by doing differentiated work than others. The current debate on learning encourages teachers to move towards the latter method of differentiation and almost all teachers in this study claimed that this was one of the methods which had increased in recent years. Teachers may need to make young people aware of the benefits of this form of differentiated teaching.
- Work experience was already accepted by most staff and pupils as providing opportunities to practise many of the 'TVEI skills' — taking responsibility, working in a team, working individually and communicating orally. To pupils (and possibly parents) who are still unconvinced of the benefits of work experience it may be useful for teachers to point out that more than three quarters of employers agreed that school leavers who had been on work experience were better prepared for employment than those who had not.

From the case studies:

- In some schools there was a discrepancy between the number of teachers who thought they should be teaching a certain skill and those who actually were teaching that skill. An audit of skills appears to be an effective way of evaluating the situation in preparation for remedying any anomalies.

- There were differences between teachers' and pupils' views on teaching methods. Staff development which provides guidance on how to analyse teaching styles may be useful in encouraging a more realistic assessment of methods used.
- Teachers in SEN schools were already making use of methods which mainstream teachers were only beginning to put into practice. Contributions to staff development from SEN school staff may provide valuable support for mainstream staff.

And finally, schools in the case studies used both whole-school approaches and specific skills based courses to tackle the challenge of helping pupils to acquire and practise a range of personal and transferable skills. Both strategies showed evidence of success and a number of common themes emerged.

Successful whole school approaches appear to have:

- begun with a small band of enthusiasts;
- identified existing good practice on which to build;
- consulted widely with staff;
- made the best use of in-school expertise;
- phased in initiatives.

Successful specific skills based courses appear to have:

- provided explicit coverage of identified skills;
- used pupil-centred teaching methods;
- emphasised choice within the course;
- made pupils aware of the skills being taught.

Full report of the project

Further details of the survey are in the full report available from the Scottish Office Industry Department, TVEI Unit, Magnet House, 59 Waterloo Street, Glasgow G2 7JP.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Scottish Office who funded the study.

Notes

TVEI skills in the curriculum

Expectations of skills needed by young people

Skills developed in different subject areas

Gender bias in ease of skills

Improving communication skills

Adapting teaching methods to pupils

Standard grade or special courses?

Clarifying what is to be learnt and why

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